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CHURCH GUARDIAN TRACTS.

"Restoration of Church Unity."

Sermon preached by the Lord Bishop
of Algoma, 8th September, 1886.

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Restoration of Church Unity.

SERMON PREACHED BY THE LORD BISHOP OF
ALGOMA IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
MONTREAL, ON THE 8TH SEPT., 1886, AT THE
OPENING SERVICE OF THE 13TH SESSION
OF THE PROVINCIAL SYNOD OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN CANADA.

"For His Body's sake, which is His Church."—Col. ii. 24.

The immediate context of these words, in which St. Paul declares that he "fills up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ in His flesh," has furnished commentators with ample scope for their exegetical ingenuity. I do not propose leading you into the labyrinth of controversy which has grown up round it. One doctrine has been extracted from it by a certain school of theologians, which it assuredly does not, and cannot, teach, viz., the co-ordinate efficacy of Christ's sufferings and those of His people in atoning for human transgression. From any such perversion of the Gospel the Apostle would have shrunk back with instinctive abhorrence, as repugnant to all his feelings, as contradicting all his most cherished conceptions of the truth. No; the thought that dominated every other, as he wrote, was a widely different one: it was that of the mystical union of Christ with His people, by His secret indwelling, through the operation of the Holy Spirit—He in them, and they in Him, by virtue of a profoundly mysterious, yet profoundly real mutual incorporation, binding, nay, as it were, blending them together in a unity and community of present experience and future prospects, and having for its ultimate end their final sanctification. This purpose, however, cannot be consummated till the Church, collectively, and believers, individually, have been perfected through suffering, measured out to each according to God's infinite knowledge of their several needs. Of this

suffering, part was already in the past, while part was yet in the future, and therefore lacking. This the Apostle, for his part, was making up. Nay; he actually gloried in suffering, because, first, Christ—according to the prophets saying, “In all their affliction He was afflicted”—was suffering in fellowship and sympathy with him, and next, not a stroke fell on him that did not, by his patient endurance, tend to the spiritual growth of the “Body of Christ, which was His Church,” because bearing its unanswerable witness to the continued presence in it of its ascended Head.

“His Body.” Such is Paul’s favorite illustration of the origin, attributes and functions of the Christian Church. Other similes describe special features. It is a “building,” of which Christ is the corner, the Apostles and Prophets the chief foundation stones; a “temple,” consecrated by the indwelling of the living God; a “household,” in which God is the common Father, and Christ the elder brother, “the first-born among many brethren;” a “field,” God’s “husbandry,” yielding, alas! both tares and wheat; the “Bride” of Christ, wedded to Him in bonds which even death has no power to dissolve or annul. But to this figure of a “Body,” of which Christ is the “Head,” he turns with a special fondness, as at once the truest and most exhaustive.

But what, brethren, can I say of this Body which others have not already said, more wisely?

I. Truism though it be, yet prevalent ignorance necessitates the frequent statement that it is a *spiritual* body, and this on various grounds: (1) because not, according to some, the creature of circumstances, nor, as others, the product of voluntary effort and association, but rather the special creation of that Divine Being through whom the active energy of the God-

head exerts itself, everywhere, and in all things, and who, as the "Creator Spiritus," alike in nature and in grace, evokes order from chaos, life from death. Here we discover the true "*fons et origo*" of the Church. Next, after that of His Son, this was God's richest gift to His creatures. "*He gave* some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." And still further, this Body is spiritual, because (2) created for spiritual ends, "that by the Church might be declared the manifold wisdom of God" (3) clothed with spiritual powers, for the promulgation of her orders, the protection of her doctrine, the regulation of her worship, the maintenance of her discipline, and all other consequences incident to her internal economy; (4) armed with a triple spiritual equipment, the written word, the duly ordained ministry, and the two Christ-appointed sacraments; and (5) animated by an indwelling spiritual life, derived direct from its Head—in itself like the vital principle in the body physical, mysterious and invisible, but known infallibly by its fruits.

II. And yet, though spiritual, a *Body*, having an objective existence, possessing a corporate life, carrying within it the secret of its own perpetuation. The invisibility of the life that stirred in its members no more forbids its taking a substantial form, than the invisibility of man's soul forbids his being corporeal. Nay, it rather implied and demanded it. Just as the Divine must manifest itself in the flesh before man could apprehend it—just as even in a future state of being the spirit will still need a body, though spiritual, as its eternal vestment—so the collective Church, informed as it is by the Holy Spirit, demands an outward and visible framework in which to enshrine itself and establish its own identity.

III. This Body *lives*, not merely as a corporate entity, whose growth and expansion are securely guaranteed through the power of self-propagation delegated to its founders, but in a loftier, profounder sense, because, in the persons of its believing members, Christ, its Head, lives in it. "Because I live," said Christ, "ye shall live also." This life it is, communicated by "the Lord and Giver of life," that alone quickens dead souls, linking each in vital union with Christ, and constituting it a member of that mystical Body over which God "gave Him to be the Head." Here, brethren, we touch the great foundation fact in the complex being of the Church. Forget this, or ignore it, or substitute aught else for it, and even the most intense stir and activity in the Body becomes only the spasmodic movement of a corpse, galvanized into the hideous mimicry of life.

IV. *Activity* will be one of the necessary notes of such a body, instinct with such life. Here, as elsewhere, life means movement, inertia death. The first commission delivered to the Apostles bore this law inscribed in its very forefront. "Go ye" was the imperial mandate of the Head, and, waiting only for the Pentecostal quickening, they went forth on their world-embracing errand, burning with a zeal which knew neither pause nor weariness, constrained by a love which "waters could not quench, nor the flood drown;" nay, which flamed forth in brighter effulgence when confronted with the agonies of martyrdom. The result we know. The primitive Church found herself face to face with Paganism—in Greece, refined and cultivated; in Rome, fierce, strong, masterful—and yet within three centuries she had so completely broken its power as to warrant Tertullian's proud boast that, though but of yesterday, she had filled their cities, camps, forum, islands, assemblies, leaving them only their temples.

Brethren, if the Church of England in Canada desires to give infallible proof of her identity as a true member of Christ's Body, believe me, it is on this pivot, very largely, the process of identification must turn. Ours is an intensely practical age, which cares nothing for abstract theories, but everything for tangible facts, which weighs churches, as all other organizations, in the scales, not of well-balanced argument, but of visible results, and, rightly enough, attaches to lofty claims, by whomever vaunted, a weightier obligation, and a demand for better work. The blood of first century Apostles, Martyrs and Confessors may run in the veins of the body, but "*noblesse oblige*;" what avails it if, instead of coursing through them in healthful pulsations, thrilling and throbbing from head to foot, it only creeps lazily and languidly, carrying with it, wherever it goes, the chill as of ice? The religious communions of this Dominion are now on their trial, and that Church, I believe, is destined (shall I not say, deserves) to occupy the foremost place which, whether primitive and Apostolic in its organization or not, shows itself the quickest and wisest in mastering the problems now pressing us so closely, alike in our cities, where thousands perish annually of drunkenness, impurity and unbelief; our far-stretching prairies, where the lonely emigrant, like David in the wilderness, yearns, too often vainly, for the courts of the Lord's House; and the regions yet beyond, where eight hundred millions of heathens are still, in this 19th Century of Christian light and knowledge, "sitting in darkness, and the shadow of death."

V. Need I say that *Elasticity* should be another note of the body of Christ. The Apostle's figure suggests this, and furnishes also the necessary limitations. How manifold the movements of the human body; how perfectly it can adopt and accommodate itself to the varying exigencies of the passing hour. Yet it does

this only on certain lines, and within a certain area, its liberty circumscribed by the base line of the spinal column. Even so, brethren, with the Church and her methods. Observe, I say, *her methods, not her doctrines*. These were definitely formulated eighteen centuries since, and call for no 'restatement.' Here there can be no departure, even by a hair's breadth. No compromise, even of a syllable. But her modes of work; these surely should be variable, elastic, susceptible of adaptation to her varying needs, whether of time, temperament, or nationality. The garment of the child is not fitted for the man. Neither is the method of the fourth century suited, necessarily, to the nineteenth. What the Church to-day needs most urgently, if she would prove herself Catholic as well as Apostolic, is a spirit of conservative flexibility, which, while zealously guarding every essential, enables her to reach out in this direction and in that, as necessity may require—not revising, but at least enlarging and enriching her Prayer-book, and making it the book of her children's *understanding*, no less than of their heart—showing herself observant of every popular religious movement, even the noisiest and most sensational, and willing to learn any lesson it can teach—quick to appreciate the priceless wealth of energy latent in the hearts and wills of the Christian women, and only too glad to provide scope for its exercise—not less jealous than hitherto of the legitimate prerogatives of her duly ordained ministry, but more ready to acknowledge the royal priesthood of her godly laity, and assign them functions somewhat more spiritual than the care of her finance—these are a few among many forms in which the Church might well display a judicious flexibility.

VI. What, brethren, shall I say of the *unity* which should mark Christ's body? In naming it, I know full well, I may seem one of those

who "rush in where even angels fear to tread," but with reverence for truth as his guide, and for his motto, the maxim: "Better to harmonize our theology with the facts than force the facts into harmony with our theology," no man need shrink from venturing even on this historic battle ground. And here there are certain facts and fixed lights which shine steadily in our path. The body of Christ—one body, not one among many, and this one universally recognized as '*the body*,' "the churches" of the New Testament, all together forming in the aggregate the one spiritual body known as "the Church," all subject to the same central authority—all owning allegiance to the same form of Ecclesiastical government—all professing "one Faith, one Lord, one Baptism." Into the invisible region of heart, and will, and conscience, doubtless, only the heart searcher could penetrate, but none the less, the tares and the wheat grew side by side in one field—the good fish and the bad were held in the net by one encircling cord. True, the separating tendency displayed itself at an early period; but, wherever it lifted its head, apostolic authority confronted it, and frowned it down. There must be no "schism in the body." The Roman Christians were to "mark them which caused division, and avoid them." The Corinthians were all to "speak the same thing," and to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." Divisions in the body and separation from it, so far from being even tacitly tolerated, are strictly forbidden and severely denounced. The dismemberment of the Body of Christ is nowhere even contemplated as a possibility. I cannot find one word in the New Testament anticipating, or providing for any departure from the then existing order of things. Christ certainly rebuked his disciples for their intolerance towards an individual miracle worker, but he did not authorize an organization to act independently of the Apostolic

twelve. St. Paul invokes a blessing on "all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," but no manuscript yet found contains the customary modern gloss, "be their denomination what it may." These, brethren, are the facts, as I find them in Scripture. And this also I find, that the force of this unity of the Body of Christ soon made itself felt, for by its unity, welded as it was into one solid, compact phalanx, under the impulse of the divine life that animated it, the Church was able to storm the seemingly most impregnable strongholds of paganism, and bring ancient, hoary idolatries in meek subjection to her feet.

Where is this compact, unbroken body now? Alas, the fair vision is departed, and instead we behold, with heavy heart and tear-filled eyes, the pitiable, humiliating spectacle of a divided Church in a rent, divided Christendom—the one body broken up into a multitude, known, each by its own distinctive signs—pronouncing, each its own peculiar shibboleth—worshipping, each after its own form, and all striving together, not for victory over the common foe, but for the pre-eminence.

Can this, brethren, be the realisation of the divine ideal? this, the answer to the High Priestly prayer, "that they all may be one, that the world (*beholding, as it can behold, only a visible, manifested oneness*), may believe that thou has sent me?"

This melancholy spectacle, I know, has its apologists. Unity, we are told, is not uniformity—nature itself proclaims the universal law, not of sameness, but diversity. These various bodies are simply the varieties of operation, referred to by the Apostle—so many regiments in the same army—clad, each in its own uniform, bearing aloft each its own standard, but all fighting under one Captain in one holy cause. But the theory utterly breaks down under the burden laid on it. It sounds liberal, large-hearted, Catholic, but there is a hollowness in

its ring which proves it not the true metal. In a word, it is at best an *ex post facto* theory—a theological afterthought, ingeniously contrived for the vindication of that which, in the light of Scripture, reason and experience, is a sin against God, a reproach to the Church and wrong to mankind. That even our brethren of these separated communions do not themselves believe in this theory we have the best possible proof, in the fact, that in an almost simultaneous movement, two of the most influential of them have effected an amalgamation of their respective subdivisions into one compact, powerful whole. We thank our brethren for this honest, and to them, most honorable acknowledgement that mere differences of opinion do not justify schism in the body of Christ, and that the fewer divisions we have the better.

Pushing this principle to its legitimate issue, may I not ask, *why have any?* Why not find our way back, if we can, to the simple, undivided unity which originally characterised the Body of Christ?

But can we? The pathway will doubtless be long and difficult. The religious eccentricities and aberrations of three centuries cannot be adjusted in a day, or possibly a life-time, but does not the divine promise guarantee to faith the removal of mountains? And here, I think, the Church of England owes it to herself, and to her children, who have gone from beneath her roof, to be the first to attempt the solution of this grave problem. So far from advances and overtures on her part being a confession of weakness, she will simply *put herself right*, when she candidly acknowledges any error in her past policy which may have alienated any of her sons, and driven them to seek elsewhere the bread they might have eaten at her table. For churches, as for individuals, the first step towards the undoing of a wrong is, the confession of it.

On the very threshold of the problem, how-

ever, lies the question, can we find a solid basis for reunion, some fixed, determinate principle round which the component, scattered members of the Body of Christ may crystallise, or group themselves for harmonious concentric action? *Clearly that basis must be essential Christian truth, held by all in common, and binding all in closest bonds of union with the one body of the first century.* A reunited Christendom, must, above all, keep touch with that. The law of historic continuity 'altereth not.' We are bound to the primitive Apostolic Church by a "threefold cord which cannot be broken." To let go our hold upon it were to drift out from the old fixed moorings, into a tossing, troubled sea, which can never rest.

The adoption of a principle like this clears our way wonderfully.

First, it disposes, once for all, of all hope of a corporate reunion with Rome. Strangely enough, its advocates fail to see that the very proposition involves a direct stultification of our own standing as a Church, and cuts the ground completely from under our feet, for if there be no insuperable barriers to our reunion with her *now*, were we not guilty of wilful schism in breaking with her three hundred years ago? But the memorable decree of infallibility has made these barriers more insurmountable than ever, binding her as it does, hand and foot, and absolutely forbidding all hope of concession or possibility of reform. We admit the validity of her orders—we admire the imposing grandeur of her ecclesiastical organization—we covet for ourselves a heroism like that displayed by many of her missionaries, one of whom, but the other day, cast in his lot with a company of lepers, we acknowledge the priceless value of the services she rendered in by-gone ages to the cause of literature, both sacred and secular—but follow her in her departure from "the faith once

delivered to the saints," we dare not. Loyalty to her were treachery to Christ.

And so I turn, with more hopefulness, to our brethren of the various Christian Communions round us, for at least a partial solution of the problem before us, and all the more confidently because here a common basis of *essential* truth is already provided. The grounds of separation lie wholly within the area of things secondary. As to the fundamentals, such as the Trinity in the Godhead—the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and its sufficiency by faith, for the forgiveness of sin, the absolute necessity for the regenerating, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, all these receive willing recognition on both sides—alas! that merely subordinate questions, not one of them, nay, not all together of sufficient gravity to affect the salvation of a single soul, should furnish the causes of separation! *It is the simple truth, and therefore should not offend, that the Christian churches round us, are built, every one, not on the primary, original deposit of fundamental truth, affirmed by our Lord and His Apostles; but, on the granular, fragmentary particles of religious thought and opinion thrown up to the surface during the upheaval of the Reformation period.* In one, the proper method and subjects of baptism; in another, the independence of local congregations; in another, the place of the subjective in the religious life; in another the question of the divine decrees, and the exact internal relations of the ministry; every one of them capable of being relegated to that debatable land which the Church must ever provide within her bounds, if she is to prove herself "the body of Christ," catholic and comprehensive, and not a mere fragment of that body, narrow and illiberal. All this, brethren, though humiliating, is still hopeful, warranting as it does the inference, that as there is no fundamental ground for separation, so there should be no really insurmountable barrier to reunion.

Let us now turn our eyes homewards. What can the Church of England contribute towards this happy consummation? If I venture the opinion that within her fold, under certain conditions, could be found the basis for its realization, I venture it in no spirit of empty, ecclesiastical self-conceit. Men infinitely wiser than I have said the same, and in quarters of the religious world where we had no reason to look for special sympathy. I quote the words of Count Joseph De Maistre, one of the foremost exponents of French Ultramontaniam. "If ever," he says, "Christians are to draw together, as everything invites them to do, it seems that the movement must begin with the Church of England. The Anglican Church, which touches us with one hand, touches also, with the other, those whom we cannot reach, and although, under a certain view, she may be a butt for the blows of both, and presents the somewhat ridiculous spectacle of a rebel who preaches obedience (observe here the Count's estimate of the Reformation), still she is very precious under other aspects, and may perhaps be compared to one of the intermediate chemicals, capable of harmonising elements naturally irreconcilable." What grounds are there for an opinion so palpably impartial as this?

1. The Church of England brings to the solution of the problem the whole body of dogmatic, fundamental truth, as taught by our Lord and His Apostles, re-affirmed by the Ecumenical Councils of the primitive Church, and condensed within the brief limits of the Apostles' Creed. The reunion would be worthless that did not demand this as the first article in its constitution.

2. The ministry. To this, in our peculiar form of it, we cling with tenacity, fortified as we are in our grasp of it by the unbroken, exceptionless history of fifteen hundred years, and firmly convinced that it is an invaluable

channel for (a) the preservation of the truth, and (b) the perpetuation from age to age of the continuous corporate life of the Body of Christ. Here, however, concessions would certainly be demanded by the conscientious scruples of our separated brethren, sufficient to bring the relations of an Episcopal and non-Episcopal ministry into harmony. Here, doubtless, would be our most serious difficulty; but even this need not prove insurmountable, were both to come together filled with an intense longing for the manifested unity of Christ's Body, and prepared for its sake to stretch the principles of mutual concession to the utmost limit allowed by truth and conscience.

3. A common basis of public worship would also be necessary. And here, possessed as we are of our matchless Liturgy, what more would be needed, or, I believe, asked than such an enrichment as I have already hinted at, with some little relaxation of the rigid, cast-iron rule of our "Act of Uniformity?" Let the Church of England, at this point, act upon her own principle, keeping "the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and too much easiness in admitting, any variation from it," and this barrier would rapidly disappear before the tide of Liturgical tendency that is setting in in other communions; nay, not tendency only, but actual, appreciative use. Practically, indeed, the principle of Liturgical worship is almost universally conceded, notably so in the Pan-Presbyterian Synod convened in Philadelphia a few years since, when some of its foremost representatives frankly advocated its adoption as one of the most effectual means of retaining their younger members within the fold. In close connection with our Liturgical worship, what shall I say of the educational value of the commemorative system of our Church year? Simply this—that every cultivated mind, outside

the Church of England, as within it, must prize it very highly for its manifold uses, whether the preservation, in its just proportions, of the essential truth on which a re-united Church would be securely built; the prevention of partiality and one-sidedness in men's conception of the truth; or the steady, systematic development of religious life and character.

4. Finally, might not the very breadth and comprehensiveness of our Church commend her highly in the eyes of all who yearn, with loving, longing hearts, for the healing of "the hurt of Zion?" Into the several causes, historical and otherwise, which have led to the existence of various, sometimes widely diverse, if not antagonistic schools of thought in our midst, and so necessitate this breadth, I cannot enter. The ancient maxim, "*In necessariis veritas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas,*" has lost none of its fitness to the Church's complex life. That Church unchurches herself which shows herself other than *uncompromising in essentials, tolerant in mere matters of opinion*. Only in such an attitude can we find the reconciliation of two seeming contradictories, the supremacy of truth, and yet the sacredness of private judgment.

And now, brethren, of all this what is the final conclusion?

(1.) Seeing the reproach that the divisions of Christendom bring on the name of Christ—the rents they make in His sacred Body—the hindrance they offer to its growth at home and abroad—and the two-edged sword they place in the hands of ungodly men everywhere—should we not strive and pray and labor for their banishment? Do not preach a doctrine of despair, and declare it impossible. Do not dismiss it as the phantom of an over-fervid imagination. The thought of it is in the hearts and prayers, and on the tongues of millions. The inspiration of the Holy Ghost has put it there. The time has come for action. Of sermons, and Synod debates, and platform

speeches, we have had enough. And in such action, who should take the initiative if not our own Church, from the strong vantage ground of the facilities she offers for such a reunion? Suppose, for example, a Commission were appointed, under the authority of our Metropolitan and Provincial Synod, composed of members, lay and clerical, fairly reflecting the average theological tone of the Church, and authorized to make overtures to the repulsive legislative councils of these Christian communions for the appointment by each of a similar Commission, with a view to preliminary enquiry, say, first, as to the existence of any general desire for such corporate reunion as I have suggested. Surely, in going even so far, our Church would in no way commit herself—would compromise no principle—nay, rather, would stand vindicated to the inner consciousness of Christians everywhere, as having discharged, however slowly, *her* responsibility for the answer to the prayer, "That they all may be one."

(2) But, brethren, before we can consistently ask others to unite with us, let us first become united among ourselves. Like the Corinthian Church, there are divisions among us. Like the Holy City rent asunder by contending factions, even while the legions of imperial Rome were thundering at the gate, demanding her surrender. The peace of our Zion is broken and its beauty marred, and its strength enfeebled by party cries and watchwords. Too often it is not the sound of holy voices that is heard within our borders, but rather the discord of "sweet bells jangled and harshly out of tune." Opinions differ, (as they necessarily must), but argument (unnecessarily) deepens into heated debate, and lo! through the door opened by self love, so frequently confounded with love of truth, come trooping in a host of evils—strong language is spoken, words are misinterpreted, motives misconstrued, acts innocent of wrong

intent misrepresented, harsh names applied, bitter feelings engendered, old friendships broken, the law of charity violated at every step. The world, meanwhile, looking on it, not *always* mute, amazement. Need these things be so, brethren? Surely, in a Church like ours, wide and roomy, Ephraim and Judah can dwell side by side, without vexing each the other. These diversities of thought and opinion are simply our several individualities, which, I believe, we shall retain, measurably, even yonder. 'Sirs, we are brethren; ' why should we strive together? We are travellers, journeying over the same thorny uphill path—let us see that we "fall not out by the way." We are members of the same sacred body, and it must not be "wounded" needlessly "in the house of its friends." We are sons in the same "household of faith," "joint heirs" in the same noble inheritance, about to kneel at the same holy table and partake of the same mystical food—let us go thence, brethren, to our deliberations, pledged by silent vow, to walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, drawing ever nearer and nearer to Him, and so, like the radius of the circle, as they approach the centre. Nearer also to one another, clinging, each of us, to his own experience and conviction of the truth, as God may have revealed it to him, but rejoicing, also, to love and honor as a brother, every man, who, though separated from us by differences of opinion wide as the poles asunder, holds fast with us and to Christ the Head, and already one with Him, invisibly, by the nerve of a living faith hopes hereafter to be one with Him visibly, in eternal manifested union.

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